

SUPERPOWERS DON'T DO WINDOWS

by John Hillen

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, American foreign policy thinkers have been striving to define a role for the United States in the post-Cold War world.¹ Their proposals have ranged from “strategic independence” on the isolationist pole to “assertive multilateralism” and “benevolent hegemony” on the interventionist pole. The sheer volume of labels and taxonomies, far from suggesting a wealth of ideas, is clear evidence of what Jonathan Clarke dubbed America’s “conceptual poverty.”²

Nonetheless, the majority of proposed post-Cold War strategies appear to seek a sensible course that lays out an active international role for the United States as a global superpower while avoiding the dreaded specter of the “global cop”—wasting American lives and resources, tilting at windmills, and minding everyone’s business but its own. Robert Tucker has called this quest for the middle road “the great issue of American foreign policy today. It is the contradiction between the persisting desire to remain the premier global power and an ever deepening aversion to bear the costs of this position.”³ Another way to understand it is to consider Americans’ desire for a reasonable policy of global engagement: one that preserves American involvement in global activities that benefit the United States but does not squander U.S. resources on global gendarmerie.⁴ As former secretary of defense James Schlesinger noted, “The reality of the post-Cold

¹This essay first appeared in *Orbis*, Spring 1997. While some of the numbers herein are dated, and some of the circumstances have changed, the author is confident that the basic argument and theoretical thrust of this piece remain relevant.

²Jonathan Clarke, “The Conceptual Poverty of U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Sept. 1993, pp. 54–66.

³Robert W. Tucker, “The Future of a Contradiction,” *National Interest*, Spring 1996, p. 20.

⁴See the results of polling in John E. Reilly, ed., *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1995* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1995), p. 6; and Center for International and Security Studies, *An Emerging Consensus: A Study of American Public Attitudes on America’s Role in the World* (College Park, Md.: Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland, July 1996), p. 5. See also Steven Kull, “What the Public Knows That Washington Doesn’t,” *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1995, p. 104.

War world is that the U.S. has limited capital for foreign ventures. . . . The clear inference is that we should husband that political capital for those matters that are of vital interest to the United States.”⁵ To that end, Washington must promote a new security compact for America’s alliances, for without substantial reworking to accommodate recent geopolitical and military trends, America’s alliance system threatens to be a burden rather than a boon. Specifically, the system should demarcate a division of labor that takes advantage of allies’ differing interests and military capabilities, with the fundamental dictum for the United States being “superpowers don’t do windows.”⁶

Currently, America’s military alliances take many different forms. In its strictest sense, an alliance is a commitment for mutual military support against some external actor(s) in a specified set of circumstances.⁷ Conversely, collective security organizations like the United Nations, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are not military alliances. Formal alliances are usually based on treaties and can range from highly institutionalized multilateral arrangements like NATO to dormant multilateral arrangements such as the Rio Treaty, to active bilateral defense alliances such as those with Korea and Japan, to latent bilateral agreements such as that with the Philippines, to de facto bilateral alliances like that of Australia and the United States, to moribund multilateral alliances like the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization.

The United States also maintains informal military alliances based upon other types of security cooperation, including the supply of military training and equipment, basing rights for U.S. troops or pre-positioned equipment, military training exchanges, and combined military exercises. These informal alliances can, in times of need, become frameworks for establishing coalitions, as demonstrated by the informal alliance between the United States and its partners in the Persian Gulf. Lastly, the United States participates in some de facto military alliances in cases where the

⁵Harry Summers, “Achilles Heel of Keeping the Peace,” *Washington Times*, Oct. 17, 1996.

⁶This organizing imperative was summed up by the former chief of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Afghan Task Force. When asked why the CIA had no intention of sorting out the squabbles of Afghan tribal leaders after the organization had been so active in helping to evict the Soviets from Afghanistan, the agent replied that “superpowers don’t do windows.” Jonathan Clarke, “Don’t Keep U.S. Troops in Bosnia,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1996.

⁷See Stephen Walt, *The Origin of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987).

U.S. national interest is so obvious that a commitment to the defense of an ally is implicit, even absent a formal defense agreement. That is the case with countries such as Israel and Taiwan.

The United States needs this flexible array of alliances to protect its interests around the globe. But however extensive and varied they may be, U.S. vital interests are finite. So, too, are U.S. resources. Hence, the critical questions that any new strategy must address are where, when, why, and how the United States ought to be willing and able to intervene militarily—and where, when, why, and how it ought *not* to be willing to deploy its forces. In the post–Cold War world, perhaps the best metaphor for the proper U.S. role in alliances is the role the Mayo Clinic plays in health affairs, or the FBI plays in law enforcement. That is, the United States should take the lead in the hierarchy of global security, but within a cooperative system in which allies play supporting roles. The Mayo Clinic and the FBI undertake only those essential duties that are in keeping with their unique talents and resources, leaving routine health care and law enforcement to local hospitals and police. For otherwise, those elite agencies would not only drown in minutiae and waste their resources, they would soon lose their capacity to perform the challenging tasks for which they were formed.

If the United States is to avoid both damaging isolationism and wasteful activism in foreign affairs, it must recognize that it cannot and should not attempt to do everything. That means America should focus on security problems in its “jurisdiction,” leaving its allies and like-minded states to play the roles of local doctor and cop. The United States also must recognize that it, and it alone, can perform the unique, expensive, and demanding task of deterring or defeating major-power aggression in any region of the globe. To maintain the skills necessary to execute this function requires strategy, doctrine, training, and force structure focused on deterrence and war fighting, not on peacekeeping missions. Lastly, the United States must realize that a failure to be prepared to combat serious security threats will sooner or later have consequences so catastrophic as to dwarf the problems of muddling through a Bosnia-, Haiti-, or Somalia-type mission.

The U.S. Defense Posture and Strategic Strain

Unilateral disarmament is a recurring pattern of American history, and the post–Cold War years are no exception. Since 1991,

the U.S. military has suffered at least a 35 percent decrease in both force structure and defense funding. As a result, the force is the smallest fielded by the nation since 1940.⁸ Unfortunately, these slashing cuts have occurred only on the supply side. On the demand side—commitments overseas—the military has actually been saddled with new responsibilities. In short, the U.S. armed forces, like so many downsized institutions, are being asked to do more with less, leading to two severe consequences. The first is a disparity between stated U.S. security commitments and the forces fielded by the nation, which has been the focus of recent intense debates.⁹ The second is the resulting strain (on both personnel and matériel) the armed forces suffer as they attempt to compensate with an accelerated operational tempo. Their effort to do so has deprived the armed services of a prudent balance among current operations, training, readiness, and funding for future operations and equipment, owing primarily to overseas deployment requirements for the myriad missions they are being asked to perform. For instance, on any given day in 1996 the army has some 105,000 soldiers permanently stationed overseas and another 40,000 on temporary duty in some sixty countries.¹⁰ This demand, coupled with reductions in force size, means that many soldiers are deploying at a rate 300–400 percent higher than during the Cold War. In a time of relative peace, nearly 15 percent of active-duty army soldiers are deployed on twelve-month hardship tours of duty. A General Accounting Office (GAO) investigation in fact found that some army units were deployed more than 210 days per year.¹¹

The other services face similar dilemmas. Expressing his concern about the high operational tempo, the U.S. Air Force chief of

staff set a target of a maximum of 120 days of temporary duty per unit. That target was drastically exceeded by many units, including airborne warning and control system units (average of 136 days), RC-135 units (168 days), combat air controllers (160 days), EC-130E units (175 days), and some electronic-warfare units that spent more than 300 days annually on deployments.¹² The navy has also exceeded its budgeted operations tempo for the past several years and predicts that it will do so again in fiscal year 1997.¹³ With the decline in the number of its warships, the navy has been forced to “gap” the assignment of aircraft carriers and other warships, meaning that other forces must forgo routine training, maintenance, and rest in order to cover the gap left by the absence of a carrier. That happened in the spring of 1996, when the USS *Nimitz* was rushed from the Persian Gulf to cover the Taiwan-China crisis, requiring the United States to deploy a squadron of air force F-15s to Jordan to continue coverage of the no-fly zone over Iraq. Even more recently, the USS *Enterprise* left the Adriatic in September 1996 to reinforce the U.S. presence in the Persian Gulf during the latest confrontation with Saddam Hussein. The sudden absence of the *Enterprise* forced the land-based aircraft supporting the implementation force in Bosnia to make up for the hundreds of weekly sorties flown by the carrier-based aircraft.

These requirements are literally wearing out men and matériel, and former Pentagon planner Robert Gaskin has noted that the military is “approaching burnout.”¹⁴ The high rate of current operations has strained budgets, equipment, and units to the point where all services have cancelled required wartime training exercises. In one such instance, peacekeeping support duties in 1995 forced three air force fighter wings to cancel critical combat training exercises.¹⁵ As a result of these trade-offs, 28 percent of the services’ frequently deployed units are not “combat ready.”¹⁶

Moreover, the Department of Defense (DOD) is unable to invest in the recapitalization of the armed forces. Procurement accounts have dropped some 70 percent in the past ten years, precipitating a 1996 rebellion by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who

⁸The 1997 end-strength goal for the active-duty military is 1.418 million. *FY 1997 Budget Briefing* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense [hereafter DOD], Mar. 4, 1996), slide 14. The next-lowest active-duty military strength number since 1940 was 1.444 million in 1948. Office of the Secretary of Defense, Comptroller, *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 1997* (Washington, D.C.: DOD, Apr. 1996), p. 160.

⁹See Baker Spring, *Will Clinton Pay the Price for America to Remain a Global Power?* Background, no. 1083 (Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, May 16, 1996); Andrew Krepinovich, *Bottom-Up Review: An Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: Defense Budget Project, 1994); Don Snider, Richard Betts, Andrew Krepinovich, et. al., “The Coming Defense Train Wreck and What to Do About It,” *Washington Quarterly*, Winter 1996, pp. 89–131. There are also several critical reports by the General Accounting Office [hereafter, GAO], including *Bottom-Up Review: Analysis of Key DoD Assumptions*, Jan. 31, 1995; and *Future Years Defense Program: Optimistic Estimates Lead to Billions in Overprogramming*, July 29, 1994.

¹⁰DOD, *Defense Almanac* (Washington, D.C.: DOD, 1996), p. 18; G. E. Willis, “On the Road Again,” *Army Times*, July 1, 1996.

¹¹GAO, *Military Readiness: A Clear Policy Is Needed to Guide Management of Frequently Deployed Units* (Washington, D.C.: GAO, Apr. 1996).

¹²Ibid. Additional information from author’s interview with the U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff Operations Group, Washington, D.C., Aug. 1996.

¹³Chief of Naval Operations, *Department of the Navy 1997 Budget* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy, 1996), p. 2-2.

¹⁴Art Pine, “U.S. Military Highly Rated, But Strains Begin to Show,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 19, 1996. See also Steven Komarow, “Smaller Forces, More Missions Add Up to GI Stress,” *USA Today*, Oct. 8, 1996.

¹⁵Author’s interview with U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff Operations Group.

¹⁶GAO, *Military Readiness*, p. 12.

begged Congress to restore \$20 billion in funding for new weapons systems. In the meantime, the current stocks of equipment are wearing down with heavy use. The C-130 aircraft supplying the Bosnia mission are at least twenty-six years old and are flying at twice their normal use rate. European-based C-130s had to be supplemented by a squadron from North Carolina because, in the words of one aircraft commander, the European-based squadron “ran their aircraft into the ground.” New C-130s are not expected until 2005 at the earliest.¹⁷ Overall, projected DOD budgets continue to live off the capital investments of the Reagan-era military buildup. As a result, by 2005 all of the tanks and most of the U.S. military aircraft will be older than the soldiers and pilots using them.

Lastly, the strain on the armed forces is lowering morale and the quality of military life. The GAO investigation noted that “officials in major commands revealed pronounced concerns about personnel problems such as divorces . . . and lowered retention.”¹⁸ The drop in retention rates is especially worrying given the time and money spent training service members. In 1995, the navy failed to reach its target on first-, second-, and third-term reenlistments.¹⁹ This problem was somewhat ameliorated by the shrinking force structure, but threatens to become acute when the navy finishes its post-Cold War drawdown.

History suggests that military powers should use the breathing space between major conflicts to replenish their military stocks, train (and rest) their personnel, and aggressively experiment with new doctrines and equipment. Instead, the U.S. military is being driven into the ground by an already high operating tempo compounded by a series of peripheral peace operations. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) has recognized that this effort is “stretching our military [to] the verge of the breaking point.” He noted that

at some point somebody needs to stand up and say there is a minimum size to being the world's only superpower, and we have gotten smaller than that in terms of our regular units, and we have an obliga-

¹⁷Bryan Bender, “Bosnia Mission Highlights Need for Improved C-130, Pilots Say,” *Defense Daily*, Oct. 9, 1996.

¹⁸GAO, *Military Readiness*, pp. 3, 13. See also Leonard Wong, Paul Bliesse, and Ronal Halverson, “Multiple Deployments: Do They Make a Difference?” paper presented at the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society Biennial Conference, Baltimore, Md., Oct. 21, 1995.

¹⁹Tom Philpott, “Is the Navy Now Too Small to Meet the Challenges of an Unstable World?” in *Seapower Almanac*, ed. Jim Hessman (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Navy League, Jan. 1996), p. 6.

tion to insist on a military in which people can serve without being burned out by the sheer constancy of their being used.²⁰

Diverging Military Competencies

Since the end of the Cold War, U.S. allies, especially in Europe, have increasingly debated the need to develop capabilities for military operations that do not rely so heavily on the United States. In general, Washington has welcomed this movement toward greater self-reliance, although the Bush administration initially sent conflicting signals about European-only defense initiatives such as the Franco-German Corps and the Western European Union (WEU). The growing enthusiasm for U.S. allies' assuming a greater share of regional security burdens was clearly expressed in 1991 when then-president of the European Union Jacques Delors triumphantly proclaimed that solving the Bosnian crisis would prove to be the “hour of Europe.”

Unfortunately, the rhetoric has not matched reality. As Professor Eliot Cohen has noted,

Two seemingly contradictory trends seem to be at work: a formal effort to develop more independent forces that can operate outside traditional frameworks and operational environments, on the one hand, and on the other increased dependence on the United States in key areas of military power.²¹

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) recently concluded that “without the US, European NATO member-states do not have the capability to mount a combined arms operation of more than 30,000 troops, with air and naval support, capable of engaging in a full-scale military conflict outside NATO borders.”²² Moreover, the core competencies of the American military and those of America's allies are diverging. While the United States focuses on deterrence and war fighting, many of its allies are refocusing their shrinking militaries on peacekeeping and operations other than war.

As with the United States, monetary concerns are a driving force behind the changing military capabilities of many U.S. allies. While Korea and Japan have increased their defense spending since the end of the Cold War (Japan markedly so), America's

²⁰Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, Address at the Center for Security Policy's annual award dinner, Washington, D.C., Sept. 18, 1996.

²¹Eliot Cohen, “The U.S. and Alliance Strategies,” paper presented at the 38th annual conference of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Dresden, Germany, Sept. 1-4, 1996.

²²International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1996/97* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 32.

European allies have cut defense spending as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) by an average of one-third.²³ Most of these cuts have been precipitated by the stringent fiscal requirements of EU monetary integration. (As of September 1996, only Luxembourg and Ireland met the Maastricht treaty conditions of having a budget deficit that is less than 3 percent of GDP and a national debt that is less than 60 percent of GDP.²⁴) Given these spending cuts, many European militaries have recently changed from the conscript system to all-volunteer forces, a move that typically halves the size of a force. And in the absence of a clear and present danger from a major power, many allies have shifted their focus away from territorial defense. Canada's new defense minister recently stated, "I am a peacekeeper, not a warrior"²⁵; and at an August 1996 ceremony to celebrate the end of conscription in the Netherlands, the Dutch defense minister noted that "the draft no longer fitted with the army's role in a world where peacekeeping has taken over from combat."²⁶

Moreover, with few exceptions, European allies are not investing in strategic airlift and sealift; strategic logistics systems, space-based command, control, communications, and intelligence (C³I) networks; and modern weapons systems based on revolutionary advances in information technology—capabilities that allow for power projection and sustained war-fighting campaigns.²⁷ The percentage of European defense spending devoted to research and development is half that of the United States, and expenditure on procurement is equally low. Many European defense analysts have noted that the decision not to invest in expensive systems has relegated their nations to reliance on the United States in campaigns outside of Europe and war-fighting contingencies even within Europe.²⁸ Yet only a few Europeans, mostly defense industrialists, have criticized the lack of investment.²⁹

²³Statistics taken from 1991–96 annual editions of International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

²⁴Fred Barbash, "Europe's Quest of Common Currency by 1999 Proving Divisive but Ferocious," *Washington Post*, Sept. 23, 1996.

²⁵Howard Schneider, "Canada's Military under Attack," *Washington Post*, Oct. 5, 1996.

²⁶"Dutch End Military Draft," *International Herald Tribune*, Sept. 1, 1996.

²⁷See R. L. Kugler, *U.S.–West European Cooperation in Out-of-Area Military Operations: Problems and Prospects* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1994); Ronald Asmus, Richard Kugler, and Stephen Larrabee, "What Will NATO Enlargement Cost?" *Survival*, Autumn 1996, pp. 5–26.

²⁸See Philip H. Gordon, "Recasting the Atlantic Alliance," *Survival*, Spring 1996, pp. 50–51; Rick Atkinson and Bradley Graham, "As Europe Seeks Wider NATO Role, Its Armies Shrink," *Washington Post*, July 29, 1996.

²⁹See, for example, Robert Bussi re, "A Europe of Security and Defence," *NATO Review*, Sept. 1995, pp. 31–35.

Hence, the divergence between U.S. and allied military capabilities grows ever more acute. The United States holds both a qualitative and an enormous quantitative advantage over its allies. For example, the United States is the only member in its many security alliances that possesses large aircraft carriers, long-range strike aircraft, stealth aircraft, a network of space-based C³I satellites and sensors, advanced aerial surveillance and reconnaissance systems, global lift capabilities, strategic logistics systems, and advanced weaponry based on information technology and the nascent "revolution in military affairs." However, Philip Gordon of IISS has noted that "this dependence isn't unpleasant enough to inspire the Europeans to do what they have to do to get around it."³⁰

Consequently, many U.S. allies, particularly the European ones, though they remain valuable as political partners, are of rapidly diminishing use as military partners in war-fighting coalition operations such as the war in the Persian Gulf. The United States dominated the military force structure of that thirty-one-state coalition, providing not only the high-tech weaponry and logistics support but also more than 70 percent of the ground troops. The only other members with ground forces of comparable quality, Great Britain and France, had to scramble to mobilize a division and large brigade, respectively.³¹ The United States also provided 76 percent of the in-theater combat aircraft and two out of every three warships, including all six coalition aircraft carriers. The command and support functions for launching air strikes also came predominantly from U.S. forces—on January 20, 1991, the third day of the air campaign against Iraq, every electronic warfare aircraft in theater was American. In addition, only American warships and a few British frigates had the technology necessary to operate together in the dangerous waters of the northern Persian Gulf.³² The political value of the broad coalition aside, the basic management philosophy behind the distribution of coalition forces was to take advantage of the special capabilities that each state brought to the table. For Germany, Japan, and Kuwait that meant money; for Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states it meant money, basing, and national infrastructure; and for Islamic coun-

³⁰Atkinson and Graham, "As Europe Seeks Wider NATO Role." See also Brooks Tigner, "Europeans Resist AGS Fast Track," *Army Times*, Oct. 14, 1996.

³¹See Jeff McCausland, *The Gulf Conflict: A Military Analysis*, Adelphi Paper 282 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1993).

³²DOD, *The Conduct of the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992), pp. 70–81. See also Department of the Navy, *The U.S. Navy in Desert Shield and Desert Storm* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991).

tries such as Egypt, Syria, and Morocco it meant political support and limited military contributions.

With decreasing support available from allies, the United States must continue to fund, provide, and train large forces for the war-fighting capabilities needed to protect the vital interests of America and its allies. That is why America's regional allies must take the lead in future Somalias, Haitis, and Bosnias—missions of regional peacekeeping, crisis management, and humanitarian relief—so as to leave the United States free to focus its energies on global power projection and large-scale combat operations.

Diverging Interests

American partnership with regional powers expected to play the role of “the cop on the beat” is not a novel idea. The Nixon Doctrine rested in part on such devolution of responsibility to certain states, such as Iran under the shah, on the assumption that these locally powerful allies could spare the United States the need to intervene directly. But in those days of the Cold War, a commonly perceived threat made for a confluence of interests between the United States and its allies. Today the situation is very different, and as the Iraq crisis of September 1996 highlighted, even a Saddam Hussein is not enough to ensure common cause in a key region. If anything, the latest round of confrontations with Iraq underscored an historical truism: alliances and coalitions tend to weaken as soon as the perception of threat diminishes. Thus, in comparison with his aggression against Kuwait and threat to the entire Arabian peninsula, Saddam's limited assault on an Iraqi Kurdish faction in August and September of 1996 elicited vastly different responses—the unilateral U.S. cruise-missile strike was unsupported or openly criticized by close allies such as France, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. Similarly, during the Cold War, the overwhelming threat posed by the Warsaw Pact was the centripetal force holding NATO together. Today, absent that unifying threat, the stakes in local crises such as that in Bosnia are different for the United States and Europe. Bosnia may be the primary European security problem and it may touch the vital national interests of European powers, but it is not a primary concern of the United States, and the large U.S. engagement there serves only to erode the sole superpower's ability to discharge its primary functions.

What are those functions? They are to prevent, deter, or confront security challenges of the first order—from the world's great

military powers such as Russia and China—and of the second order—from aggressive and well-armed rogue regimes such as those in Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. Bosnia, while a compelling issue, is a third-order security challenge on the periphery of U.S. interests, and the U.S. commitment to do the heavy lifting for a peacekeeping force there only misconstrues the true American role in European and global security. The United States should be involved militarily, but in a supporting rather than a lead role.

So far, most post–Cold War security challenges have been well below the threshold of a major-power threat necessitating significant U.S. involvement and leadership. It follows that regional devolution should be implemented in handling local threats. That is, allies closest to the problem and whose interests are most affected should be prime movers in mitigating the threat and should not be overly dependent on an ally that may have little interest in addressing the crisis. An “all for one and one for all” approach to every security dilemma, no matter what size, does not make sense for U.S. alliances. Instead, Washington must promote structures, like NATO's new combined joint task force (CJTF), that empower regional allies to tackle local crises. As Owen Harries writes,

In deciding when to deploy [military force], Washington should practice the sound federal principle of subsidiarity—that is, allowing problems to be handled at the level closest to the problem. This way, a sense of responsibility can be developed throughout the international system and the United States can reserve its own intentions for the great issues involving its vital interests, acting as a balancer of last resort rather than a busybody and bully.³³

However, America's Cold War military alliances still dominate the international arena, and until other security apparatuses emerge, U.S.-led alliances are often the default mechanism for responding to local problems. In Bosnia, NATO was called upon to solve the crisis, and the United States was thereby thrust into the political and military lead. But such quasi-military missions in areas of marginal importance are unpopular with the American public and offer little return for the investment of scarce national security resources. Many Americans question the utility of alliances in which the imperative of leadership forces the United States into operations and actions it might not otherwise undertake. That was the case in Bosnia, where preserving the credibility of NATO and the United States became the motivation for what

³³Owen Harries, “Dole's Calculated Pragmatism,” *New York Times Magazine*, Sept. 22, 1996.

Clinton administration officials characterized as a regrettable mission, the U.S.-led intervention.³⁴ Clearly the alliance and U.S. leadership were not functioning as the means to the ends of U.S. foreign policy, but became the end in themselves.

The confluence of these trends does not augur well for the continued management of international peace and security through an enduring alliance system. Alliances are intended to be a cost-effective means of protecting and promoting American interests. But the United States is no longer able to discriminate among security priorities, and the alliance system is hampering the effectiveness of U.S. national strategy. To reverse this slide, the United States must take charge of reforming the system instead of mistaking defense of the status quo for a manifestation of leadership.

Moreover, U.S. alliance leadership should not become a shibboleth for crisis management worldwide. Much as domestic policy analysts have questioned the utility of federal leadership in areas such as education and welfare, American foreign policy leadership should recognize a similar imperative in the global security hierarchy and not use America's leading role to usurp the responsibility, or discourage the capability, of alliance partners to take decisive action on minor regional affairs. Heeding these caveats, Washington should promote a security compact built on the following two principles.

Focus on Collective Defense

The majority of security challenges in the post-Cold War world are likely to be local crises requiring a protracted yet low-level military commitment. The United States should not squander its power on these tangential missions, though they may be the media rage of the moment. Rather, it must focus on deterring and defeating major-power threats (such as state-to-state aggression) in key regions.

With the exception of the U.S. role in North and Central America, Washington's commitment to regional security in Europe, the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, East Asia, and the Western Hemisphere is one of collective defense, not collective security. An alliance of collective defense (such as NATO) is a collaborative effort to defend against threats to the balance of power in a region through precisely focused missions.

³⁴See John Pomfret, "U.S. Builds Arc of Alliances to Contain Serbia's Power," *Washington Post*, Dec. 19, 1995.

An alliance of collective security (such as the United Nations, OSCE, or ASEAN), on the other hand, provides a forum through which members can organize cooperative responses to various problems of peace and security, not just major-power threats. Collective security missions are broadly defined, sometimes anticipate problems, and can encompass nonmilitary efforts as well as limited or quasi-military interventions, including humanitarian intervention, support to nation building, peacekeeping, and peace enforcement. Collective security does not offer the same unambiguous goals as collective defense and often results in disputes among alliance members, as seen in the imbroglio among NATO allies about the U.N. mission to Somalia in 1993.³⁵ Overall, these alliances tend to be substantially less cohesive and decisive than those of collective defense.

The critical distinction between collective defense and collective security has been lost in recent years, especially in Europe, where local problems have thrust themselves onto NATO's agenda in the "threat vacuum" left by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Using NATO for peripheral, ambiguous, and inconclusive security missions, such as that in the Balkans, could eventually erode U.S. public support for an American role in Europe. "Bring the boys home" will be the rallying cry if the *raison d'être* for an American military presence in Europe becomes policing local troubles on behalf of prosperous European allies.

Make the U.S. Role Unique and Decisive

With few exceptions, no U.S. allies have global security responsibilities. (Great Britain and France do, albeit in a more limited fashion.) Thus, as the world's only superpower with a full range of such commitments, the United States should play a unique and decisive role in its military alliances, and not needlessly duplicate the capabilities of its allies.

During the Cold War, America and its allies had qualitatively similar operational capabilities for territorial defense. While the United States had more forces and unique strategic capabilities, America's allies were able to field interoperable capabilities on the battlefield (tactical aircraft, artillery, tanks, personnel carriers, and, in the case of Great Britain and France, nuclear weapons). But the evolution of core military competencies has altered this calculus. A new security compact should focus U.S. military capa-

³⁵See Kenneth Allard, *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1995), pp. 56-57.

bilities on missions of deterrence and war fighting where the presence of U.S. forces can alone provide the decisive edge.

In some cases the United States can make a decisive contribution with only a limited deployment of small but special capabilities (e.g., logistics or intelligence assets) that multiply the effectiveness of a coalition otherwise dominated by allies. The United States should be enthusiastic about providing a limited but decisive edge to an operation led by allies so long as it does not undermine the U.S. ability to meet more important security commitments elsewhere. In broader missions, such as the war in the Persian Gulf, the United States might be called upon to dominate the force structure, command-and-control arrangements, and operational planning. In management guru Peter Drucker's words,

Effective leaders delegate a good many things; they have to or they drown in trivia. But they do not delegate the one thing that only they can do with excellence, the one thing that will make a difference, the one thing that will set standards, the one thing they want to be remembered for. They do it.³⁶

Leadership in the alliance system naturally devolves on the United States, owing to the major-power security guarantee that only America can deliver and the enormous power it can bring to bear. Along with the unique and decisive military capabilities it can deploy for almost any operation, these constitute the immutable pillars of U.S. leadership in military alliances, a role that cannot be delegated. But a failure to delegate any responsibilities risks turning the alliance system into what political scientist Benjamin Schwarz calls a "wasting proposition" that needlessly siphons off American resources.³⁷

The United States therefore must not feel trapped into leading all ambiguous missions. A Herculean effort to provide the preponderance of resources in every alliance would only sacrifice U.S. resources and determination, while giving its allies carte blanche to concentrate on "productivity, market penetration, wealth, and innovation: the kind of power that matters most in today's world."³⁸

³⁶Peter Drucker, "Not Enough Generals Were Killed," *Forbes ASAP*, Apr. 8, 1996, p. 104.

³⁷Benjamin C. Schwarz, "The Arcana of Empire and the Dilemma of American National Security," *Salmagundi*, Winter/Spring 1994, p. 195. Schwarz's case is a variant of the theme of "imperial overstretch" raised in Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987).

³⁸Ronald Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 5.

Fixing the Alliances

If the United States is to counteract the trends eroding the alliance system and avoid being bankrupted by trying to play clinician, cop, and social worker to the world, it must insist on a fair apportioning of responsibilities and costs with its allies. Washington must devise new approaches to some alliances, reject the proposed restructuring of others, perhaps conclude some new ones, and in every case subject its alliances to scrutiny designed to determine how they can best support American interests.

Europe. In post-Cold War Europe and the Mediterranean, NATO remains the premier fact of life in the security arena. And even with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the collective defense of Europe is an enduring American interest. Moreover, NATO's unprecedented levels of institutionalization and cooperation make it the most credible, functional, and useful military alliance of all time. As the war in the Persian Gulf highlighted, the work that has gone into NATO standards, interoperability, and defense cooperation can be an enormous advantage in operations outside of NATO as well.

Nonetheless, the continued success of the alliance will depend on the will and ability of NATO's European (and Canadian) members to practice increased self-reliance in local missions. This shifting must in turn be bolstered by mechanisms such as the combined joint task force, an organizational framework that will allow European allies to borrow NATO resources for European-led missions. The CJTF was proposed by the United States in 1993 and finally approved by NATO in June 1996. It need only be taken off the drawing board and put into practice.

Once implemented, the CJTF structure will allow NATO and Europe to abandon the Cold War paradigm of "all for one and one for all" by tailoring packages for specific missions. A CJTF operation can be composed of almost any mix of allied units and led by either an American (as in NATO's war-fighting structure) or European commander. An operational force can even be formed outside of NATO and led by other European security organizations, for example, the WEU or the OSCE. In that case, the CJTF could temporarily "lease" NATO units that would be "separable but not separate." A CJTF would also allow non-NATO European states to contribute troops, as many have done for the implementation force in Bosnia.

The U.S. ambassador to NATO, Robert Hunter, called the CJTF "the first significant change in the way the alliance does

business since 1966" (when the French left the military structure of the alliance).³⁹ Not only does the CJTF's flexibility permit allies with the greatest interest in local crises to take the lead and help to equip them for the necessary missions, it can be equally valuable to NATO's traditional task of providing a credible combat capability to deter a major-power threat in Europe. For once CJTF is put in charge of handling lesser security dilemmas, the United States will be free to concentrate on its singular role as NATO's war-fighting leader. That is why the CJTF must not be allowed to atrophy in the committee rooms at NATO headquarters but should manage the follow-on force in Bosnia through 1997 and beyond. The United States might still contribute support capabilities to this European-led CJTF, but the bulk of the troops would come from NATO allies. In 1998, any residual Bosnia force would become entirely European. It would still be a CJTF, but it would be led by a European organization and would no longer be officially connected with NATO.

Of all the U.S. alliances, both formal and informal, NATO is most in need of reform aimed at a clear division of labor. America's NATO allies are prosperous and democratic states. Though they chose to cut defense spending, cut capabilities, and follow ineffective half-measures in Bosnia for four years, they are more than capable of handling European peacekeeping missions with support in key areas from the United States. Mechanisms such as the CJTF will allow European allies to pick up the slack in missions like Bosnia, freeing the United States for more important security tasks.

East Asia. During the Cold War, the U.S. bilateral alliance with Japan was the cornerstone of American strategy in East Asia. The alliance remains critical today, especially because China and North Korea pose two of the most salient threats in a region of increasing importance to U.S. national security. Over the years, however, many have criticized the structure of this relationship.⁴⁰ Some observers believe that the United States pays too much to maintain some 47,000 troops in Japan when many Japanese (especially the Okinawans) want the troops to leave. Others argue that the Japanese take advantage of America's security blanket to invest would-be defense funds in economic production that eventually harms the United States in unfair trade deals. Still others

maintain that in a major-power crisis in East Asia, the Japanese would not support U.S. combat operations unless Japan itself were attacked.

All these points deserve consideration in an ongoing reassessment of the U.S.-Japanese alliance. Nonetheless, the basic structure of the alliance serves America well. The U.S. mission in the alliance focuses on collective defense, while Japan's Self-Defense Force is committed to defending Japan and the sea lanes out to one thousand nautical miles from the home islands. U.S. military forces based in Japan also deter regional threats, as they did in March 1996 when the deployment of two U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups to the area around Taiwan convinced China that the United States was still determined to hold Beijing to its promise not to pursue coercive unification. And with Japan contributing more than \$5 billion to the basing of U.S. troops and facilities, the alliance is by far the best cost-sharing arrangement with any ally. (The Clinton administration maintains that it would be more expensive to base those troops back in the United States.)⁴¹

In April 1996, the United States and Japan concluded additional defense cooperation arrangements that would marginally increase Japan's role in Asian security affairs. These steps were intended to make Japan a better partner in regional contingencies, and not to precipitate a reevaluation of each country's distinct role.

But many observers dismissed these steps as cosmetic and still call for Japan to assume an even greater Asian security role. Yet traditionally a fully militarized Japan with a unilateral defense policy has been destabilizing to the region. Moreover, Japan's remilitarization would not further the alliance goals of the security treaty and could even work against U.S. strategy in the Asia-Pacific region. The United States therefore should not ask Japan to assume the role of deterring major-power conflict in the region. In East Asia, as elsewhere, the job of confronting threats to the balance of power is uniquely America's. But Washington should encourage Tokyo no less than London, Paris, or Bonn to contribute to regional missions. Japanese participation in the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Cambodia in 1993 was a valuable first step. So long as Japan does not assume a grand strategic role, or build weapons or intelligence systems conducive to grand strategy, its Asian neighbors need not fear—and may in time welcome—a Japanese “cop” on the local police force.

³⁹“NATO Acquires a European Identity,” *Economist*, June 8, 1996, p. 51.

⁴⁰See, for example, Ted Galen Carpenter, *Paternalism and Dependence: The U.S.-Japanese Security Relationship*, Policy Analysis, no. 244 (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, Nov. 1, 1995).

⁴¹DOD, *United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region* (Washington, D.C.: DOD, Feb. 1995), p. 24.

The U.S.–South Korea alliance, by contrast, is more narrowly conceived since it exists to defend against a sole scenario: invasion of South Korea by North Korea. Some critics have questioned the presence of 34,000 American troops in Korea, labeling them redundant given the large size of the South Korean defense forces. However, the United States does not maintain ground troops in Korea because South Korea needs another infantry division to defend itself. Rather, U.S. ground troops are the embodiment of a commitment to peace in what is perhaps the most volatile corner of the great-power international system. It is there, on the borders of Korea, that Russia, China, Japan, and the United States meet. It is there that a rogue regime possesses the capability, and perhaps the intention, to light the fuse of great-power war. Were the United States to withdraw, no other power could provide a reassuring presence. Indeed, any effort by Russia, China, or Japan to do so would risk sparking the very conflict it was meant to repress.

The Middle East. Ad hoc coalitions drawn from de facto alliances are not only useful but preferable to formal de jure alliances like NATO in regions comprised of disparate states divided by religion, ideology, and geopolitics. The United States maintains such a “coalition in waiting” in the Persian Gulf, where security agreements with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf states are marked by low-key defense cooperation agreements regarding basing privileges, defense training and supply, and combined military exercises. Though there is no treaty requirement—and little in the way of positive inducements to alliance—it is well understood that the negative inducement to unity afforded by the threat of Iraqi (or Iranian) aggression suffices to preserve the balance of power implicit in the strategy of “dual containment.” Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states provide invaluable ports, bases, supplies, and key infrastructure. Germany and Japan chipped in billions to help finance the war in the Persian Gulf and would be asked, in need, to do so again. NATO allies and others provide air, sea, and ground assets to complement the U.S. forces. Islamic countries such as Egypt, Syria, Morocco, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and others contribute forces that may have been militarily irrelevant to past coalitions but were politically viable.

Local allies aside, the Gulf is clearly a case where the United States must be directly engaged by reason of its own interest—oil, most obviously, and the desire to shelter Israel and friendly Arab states from regional chaos—and by reason of threat from rogue regimes known to crave missiles and weapons of mass destruc-

tion. But in the Middle East no less than in the Balkans, the United States cannot assume responsibility for deterring or punishing the equivalent of “street crime”—for instance, the violence among rival Kurdish factions. For to try to do so and fail would destroy the superpower’s credibility, while to deploy the forces needed to succeed would once again erode the strapped U.S. military’s ability to perform its indispensable war-fighting mission. That is why the United States must take vigorous and immediate steps to support local allies, Turkey above all, in assuming leadership roles in the Middle East.

Elsewhere. There are, to put the point bluntly, no other regions of the world in which U.S. vital interests are directly threatened at present or will be in the near future. There are therefore no other regions of the world in which U.S. military forces need to be engaged through a military alliance. That is not to say that a future Russian (or Chinese) thrust into Central Asia would not be a scary signal that American power may have to be invoked. But Americans are not prepared to die for Tajikistan, and Washington certainly cannot broker an effective alliance in that region. U.S. diplomatic offices may be of use in South and Southeast Asia, but the American public is not willing, nor is the U.S. military prepared, to ally with or coerce India, Pakistan, or China—or Vietnam—in case of regional strife. Africa is very much on the map of charitable Americans but is completely off the map of the Pentagon. Latin America, of course, remains a U.S. bailiwick, but everyone is happier when needed interventions are performed by Canadians or regional states rather than by “Yankee imperialists.”

But if the United States refrains from entering military alliances and takes no more than a supporting role in ethnic and religious conflicts or humanitarian disasters in most of the Third World, who will undertake these tasks? It is simply up to regional powers, with or without cooperation from the United Nations, to walk the beats in their neighborhoods. To the extent those powers need occasional U.S. assistance in logistics, intelligence, or other specialized capabilities, let them seek U.S. help, rather than vice versa. Let them ask Washington for an “alliance” or understanding, instead of the other way around. And the candidates for the roles of local leaders are obvious. In Latin America, the standouts are Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Venezuela. In South Asia, India and Pakistan have no choice but to mend their fences or prepare to suffer forever. In Africa, the present prospects for regional leaders of any sort are dim. In the ex-Soviet world, the only possible

policeman is, yes, Russia, assuming that unhappy country proves willing and able to take its place as a responsible regional power in league with the West. Filling out this roster of local “G.P.s” and “cops on the beat” may take many decades. But if there is to be a new world order, that is how it will come about, not through increased and indiscriminate American intervention, but through precisely the opposite. That is so, first, because an America whose military chases every ambulance will soon be unable to prevent the big calamities and, secondly, because it will soon exhaust Americans’ tolerance even for seeing to little contingencies.

That does not mean that the United States will not participate in lesser interventions that have clear goals and a chance for success. It also does not preclude aggressive U.S. diplomatic and economic strategies for those areas where the United States does not have a military alliance. Regional devolution, as an alliance strategy, merely means that all members should box at their own weight level to get the most out of the team.

Conclusion

Most Americans would agree that the United States must be active in the world, but not so active that the effort wastes American resources and energies in interventions that yield little or no payoff and undermine military preparedness. The need for a policy of highly selective engagement is all the more acute owing to the numerous security challenges that the United States must address with a shrinking pool of military resources. There is just no alternative, therefore, to reforming U.S. alliances in ways that forestall further confusion about the U.S. role in minor post-Cold War security challenges. The way to begin is simply to announce to America’s allies and partners the criteria that will define when, where, why, and how the United States might choose to use military force and, by implication, the situations in which it will expect its partners to assume leadership. In other words, America proclaims that “superpowers don’t do windows,” so if you want your local windows washed, you had better gear up to do them yourselves.

Such an “agonizing reappraisal” might shock some, especially in Europe, but it is based on a commonsense recognition that there is a hierarchy in international security composed of local military powers, regional powers, global powers, superpowers, and entities such as alliances and international organizations. The hierarchy

conduces to order rather than chaos when each constituent part has roles and responsibilities that match its interests and capabilities. If an organization tries to do too much, it fails. That has been evident for the past few years with the United Nations. Similarly, if the United States attempts to do too much, as it does now, its forces become overstretched and lose sight of their most significant roles.

Consequently, the United States should focus its security policies on major threats such as other great powers or rogue regimes that can upset the local balance of power in key regions. America’s allies should take the lead in local crisis management, peacekeeping, and humanitarian relief operations. History shows that another major conflict is never far away and is usually unpredictable. The United States is the only nation capable of forestalling or fighting that conflict. It must remain focused on doing so, for that is the task no one else can do.